



## Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

### JULY 18 LD4SOS NEWSLETTER

#### DETENTION.

The British Red Cross has recently [published its report](#) on the humanitarian consequences of detention “Never Truly Free”. The report focuses particularly on the impact on mental health. The report was [raised by Sally Hamwee](#) in a House of Lords debate when she quoted extensively from it about the awful health problems, especially for long term mental health. You can read more about the report and what Sally said in our [web article](#).

The report makes a number of recommendations most of which are part of our Lib Dem policies. They include using detention only as a last resort, never detaining vulnerable people, and for others not exceeding a statutory maximum of 28 days. It also recommends that the onerous and traumatic experience of immigration reporting should be overhauled, providing end to end asylum support and never detaining people when they attend to report.

#### HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT.

We fully support the open letter from numerous voluntary organisations to the Home Secretary. The Windrush scandal revealed the impossible burden placed on individuals to prove their entitlement to be in the UK. Freedom From Torture has brought together refugee charities, campaigning and community groups and faith leaders behind a joint open letter to the Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, highlighting that this hostile environment surrounding decision-making is endemic across the Home Office, and urging a more humane approach when dealing with asylum applications, and reasonable application of the standard of proof. The letter highlights cases where victims of torture seeking refuge in the UK are being driven to suicide by the Home Office’s immigration system, which “accuses them of telling lies, even as they try to tell the truth.” It calls on the Home Secretary to ensure the Windrush-lessons-learned review looks as well at the misapplication of the standard of proof as a systemic HO problem; and to agree to an independent public audit of the application of the standard of proof in asylum decision-making. The full letter and signatories can be found [here](#) and the Guardian coverage [here](#).

In a [debate last week](#) Alistair Carmichael said “*The hostile environment is just one indication of the negative mindset that has shaped Home Office policy and thinking on immigration for years now.*” He referred to the cost of visa applications, bad decision making and removal or rights of appeal. Then “*during this pause, will the Government look at immigration policies in the round and ensure we have a more constructive and positive debate in future on the contribution that immigration can make to our economy*”.

Before that, last month, Sally Hamwee [contributed to the debate](#) on the impact on those with residency and tenancy rights of the Government’s “hostile environment” approach towards “illegal immigration”. Lords Taverne and Jones also spoke. The Lords drew on reports from Refugee Action, Immigration Lawyers and End Violence Against Women Coalition which highlighted the impact of the policy, not just on the Windrush generation but others, including leaving many women at risk of violence and exploitation scaring them away from seeking help. They noted that the Independent Inspector of Borders & Immigration had also reported on three areas covered by the policy, finding real concerns about incorrect data when looking at driving licences and bank accounts. The inspector noted that “*During file sampling in the inspection, a number of examples of individuals were wrongly listed as being in the UK without leave*”. As he observed “*The Home Office did not appear to appreciate the seriousness of such errors for individuals affected and the proposed advance of redress of individuals who had left the UK with valid leave outstanding... was inadequate.*” “The right to rent” [review](#)<sup>[CS1]</sup>

published in March 2018 was even more devastating in its conclusions, with the Chief Inspector reporting the scheme to be wholly ineffective.

In [a report](#) published recently, the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) — comprising representatives of the Baptist Union, Methodist Church, United Reformed Church (URC), and Church of Scotland — called for the end of the hostile environment, which is the set of policies aimed at making life difficult for immigrants. John Skipworth, LD4SOS Chair, spoke about this at the General Assembly of the URC, and they are now going to pursue the recommendations in the report.

**SEPARATING CHILDREN.** Whilst there is quite rightly uproar at what Trump was doing in the US, separating children from their parents, all is not right in the UK; as BID ([Bail for Immigration Detainees](#)) points out and in [this Guardian article](#), our Home Office cruelly separates families too.

**SEPARATED CHILDREN.** Children granted refugee status have no right to sponsor family to join them in the UK - not their mums, their dads, their brothers nor their sisters. No one at all.

**PROFIT FROM CHILDREN.** Shas Sheehan and Sally Hamwee have raised the issue of the high cost of immigration fees particularly for children. Shas said *“the figure of more than £1,000 per child that is being demanded is, according to the Government’s own figures, comprised of £372 in administration fees with the remaining £640 being pure profit: profit, including even on the backs of children in care.”* This has led to a massive £100 million profit over the last 5 years.

**YOUNG PEOPLE SUICIDES.** [This report says](#) that at least three teenage refugees, coming up to the age 18, who arrived in Britain from the migrant camp in Calais have killed themselves in the past six months, raising questions about how the Home Office and local authorities handle profoundly vulnerable asylum-seeking children and young people in the UK. A tragic issue that Roger Roberts is raising repeatedly.

**NHS BIRTHDAY.** Amongst the “Happy 70th Birthday NHS!” celebrations we need to celebrate that the NHS funds [“Building Bridges”](#), which is helping refugee doctors to re-qualify here & find jobs appropriate to their qualifications. Win win, as it helps fill gaps in NHS provision too!

**LGBT ISSUES.** Lib Dem Lord Paul Scriven [has been campaigning](#) to prevent a Nigerian asylum seeker, who fled to Britain to avoid prosecution for being gay, being deported after being held for six months in an immigration detention centre. [As described here](#), the threat hanging over Adeniyi Raji, 43, who received death threats on social media, highlights the increasing number of claims to the Home Office by individuals from countries where homosexuality is outlawed.

**Ice&fire theatre** are performing readings of "This Is Who I Am", first-hand accounts of LGBT+people seeking asylum in UK; you can see the trailer [here](#). All they need is a space, audience & 3 chairs - get in touch if you would like to host a reading - [seb@iceandfire.co.uk](mailto:seb@iceandfire.co.uk)

**MPs NOT BORDER GUARDS.** All MPs should provide fair and just representation for everyone living in their constituency, whatever their immigration status. It has been revealed MPs have reported more than 700 cases of suspected immigration abuse to authorities since 2012. Use this [online form](#) to email your MP and ask them to sign up to a public pledge not to report constituents to the Home Office for immigration enforcement.

**TORTURE SURVIVORS.** Tim Farron has supported the “Survivors speak out”, marking the work of the organisations that continue to campaign against, and support victims of, torture.

**HOME OFFICE REFORM.** We all know why this is needed and Roger Roberts is [calling on the need](#) for total reform of Home Office to ensure that the likes of the Windrush scandal never happens again.

**FAMILY REUNION.** Safe Passage, working across political parties, secured a major political win to ensure that the [Family Reunion route for child refugees from Europe to the UK remains open after Brexit](#). Following pressure from their advocacy team, the Home Office agreed to create a new status for children transferred under the Dubs scheme that guarantees them the right to residency and puts them on a pathway to indefinite leave to remain. Also they launched their Kindertransport Legacy Campaign in the House of Lords, marking 80 years since British communities took in 10,000 unaccompanied child refugees fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe. The key message of their campaign is [‘80 years on, child refugees still need safe passage’](#).

The campaign from Liberal Democrats for this continues, and Alistair Carmichael spoke out in debate [here](#) and [here](#).

**REFUGEE COUNCIL WINS CHALLENGE TO HOME OFFICE ON DUTY TO PROTECT.** The Refugee Council took the Home Office to court arguing that it had failed in its legal duty to protect a Vietnamese boy from falling back into the hands of traffickers. The boy, known as TDT, was held in detention as immigration officer’s initially thought that he was an adult. The Refugee Council trafficking project and his solicitor helped him to challenge this and had secured the agreement of the local council to provide safe accommodation, and they asked the HO to release him into their care. Instead TDT was released into an address they had not checked out and they did not contact the local authority, RC or his solicitor despite their pleas that he be released only to safe accommodation. TDT has not been seen since the day of his release. The Court of Appeal upheld the Refugee Council’s challenge that the HO had failed to protect this young person and was highly critical of the HO. The Refugee Council hopes that this may led to the government recognising its failures and taking more steps to protect vulnerable people who are entitled to care. We all hope so!

**RIGHT TO WORK.** Tim Farron [has spoken up](#) “Those seeking asylum in the [UK](#) are currently banned from working and, as a result, they are forced to live in penury and are denied the right to contribute their skills to our society. Does the [Minister](#) agree that this system is lacking in both compassion and common sense? Will she reform it?”

**REFUGEES AT HOME** [is an organisation](#) that links and supports people with spare rooms to asylum seekers or refugees in need.

**HEALTHCARE CHARGING.** Asylum Matters has produced this [useful briefing](#) for those working in the field on eligibility. They do need for their campaign any information about problems still being encountered, details in the leaflet.

**NUMBERS OF REFUGEES CONTINUE TO GROW.** Putting the situation into perspective, the [Refugee Council reports](#) that UNHCR has published their [Global Trends](#) report for 2017 revealing that 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced, an increase of 2.9 million people on the previous year. Of this number, 40 million people had been displaced within their own countries, while 25.4 million people had been forced to flee their countries and become refugees. An additional 3.1 million people are still awaiting a decision on their claim for asylum.

**LEGAL AID U TURN FOR SOME.** The Government has listened to the Children’s Society who have campaigned for 5 years to bring back legal aid for separated and unaccompanied children. They are bringing in new legislation, so around 15,000 children in the UK will get the legal aid they need. A success to celebrate.